

Raised Bill 1155 and Raised Bill 6688

To The Judiciary Committee:

After reviewing Raised Bill 1155 and Raised Bill 6688, I am writing to respectfully voice my **Opposition to Raised Bill 1155** and my **Support for Raised Bill 6688**.

I am a divorced, single mom of 4, self-employed as a Small Business and Life Coach and I work primarily with divorced women. I work with divorced women from all socio-economic backgrounds, and have seen first-hand how divorce can negatively impact women and children both financially and emotionally.

I am very concerned about the changes being proposed in Raised Bill 1155. It makes changes to the provisions relating to property division, legal separation, arbitration, alimony, modification of alimony, child support, and cohabitation without having been researched or studied. It was drafted by a committee of four without being studied, approved, or supported from the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, the Connecticut Bar Association Family Law Section, CWEALF, Hartford Legal Services, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, or the Legal Assistance Resource Center.

In addition, Raised Bill 1155 includes mandatory alimony guidelines based on arbitrary and random percentages and formulas, which could potentially discriminate against women and the poor. Section 5, subsection (c), of RB 1155 states that the guidelines are "suggested," but then states in subsection (d) the court must state whether it used the guidelines and if not, why not. There have not been any sociological studies of the effects of alimony orders, nor is there any economic data supporting the proposed rates or percentages. This Bill improperly elevates income above all other statutory criteria to determine alimony, with no consideration of cost of living increases or tax implications, in addition to putting a cap on income.

I am in complete support of women moving on in all areas of their life after divorce. In my work, I inspire, empower, and support women in that goal. However, given that each family's circumstances are different, it is illogical to apply the "cookie cutter" solution that is being proposed in Raised Bill 1155. A Bill such as this needs to have time, thought, and study put into it.

Raised Bill 6688 addresses the issues related to alimony in a far better way. It provides for a Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee to study and report back on or before February 1, 2014. This independent legal research arm of the legislature will do the necessary research and data collection. Section 5 of Raised Bill 6688 specifically calls for the committee to "collect empirical data relating to the award of alimony by courts in the state and make recommendations for revisions to State statutes as the committee deems just and equitable."

In addition, I would ask that the court specify the basis for all alimony orders, not just non-modifiable, permanent alimony awards as outlined in Subsection 46b-82 (b) of Raised Bill 6688. All people are entitled to know the basis of such orders, not just permanent orders. Given the growing percentage of self-represented parties, this would reduce the number of appeals.

I would also like to share with the Committee the concerns of other women who also wrote letters Opposing Raised Bill 1155 and Supporting Raised Bill 6688, but were hesitant to go on public record...

"Some of us are in court with ex-husbands who are seeking alimony modification or in court with custody issues. Some of us are looking for employment and interviewing for jobs, after being home for 20 years as stay at home mothers in order to be at home to raise our children and enabling their father's careers in most cases to develop and succeed to the level they are at today. Many of us are afraid, and none of us can afford for our names to be Googled by potential employers and have our names tied to alimony reform. Many of us are at a loss for letting the people in Hartford know just how detrimental Bill 1155 would be for women and children, most especially."

"There are many divorced women in Fairfield County who are concerned about what the proposed Bill 1155 would mean to them and their children. It would have very negative effects on many of us and we strongly support the other Raised Bill 6688 because at least that bill suggests forming a committee for further independent review and further investigations of key points such as definition of income."

"A bill with percentages on alimony, with no cost of living adjustments, and on capping income, needs to have time and thought and study put into it. The fact is that Fairfield County is not like the rest of the state, or like some of the other states that have passed similar bills. If RB 1155 were to be passed it would greatly hurt many of the families in Fairfield County. Many primary breadwinners in lower Fairfield County have very tricky definitions of income, stock options and golden parachute options. Somehow this needs to be taken into consideration before something is just passed."

"If you have any suggestions as to how our voices could be better heard please let us know. If you would ever like to meet with, or speak with us a group, we would be happy to share our thoughts with you. We are very concerned and watching this carefully. We are hoping that you will do whatever you can do in your power to make sure that Raised Bill 1155 is not passed and that at least the proper research and care can be put into such a terribly important issue as outlined in Raised Bill 6688."

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter affecting so many families in the state of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Colleen S. Bushby